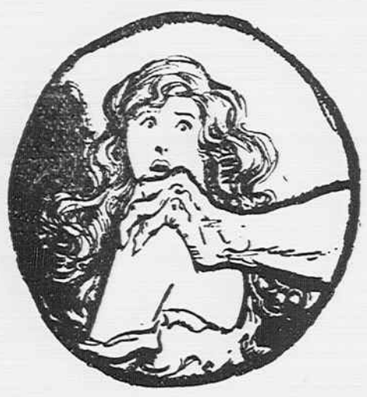


The Strange Case of MARY PAGE

The Great McClure Mystery Story, Written by FREDERICK LEWIS In Collaboration With JOHN T. M'INTYRE, Author of the Ashton Kirk Detective Stories. *Read the Story and See the Essanay Moving Pictures*

SYNOPSIS.

Mary Page, actress, is accused of the murder of James Pollock and is defended by her lover, Philip Langdon. Pollock was intoxicated. At Mary's trial she admits she had the revolver. Her maid testifies that Mary threatened Pollock with it previously, and Mary's leading man implicates Langdon. How Mary disappeared from the scene of the crime is a mystery. Brandon tells of a strange hand print he saw on Mary's shoulder.

HER MOTHER'S STORY

THE District Attorney stood at the window of his private office adjoining the court and stared down at the hurrying throngs while one nervous hand beat a devil's tattoo again the somewhat grimy pane.

It had been raining, and the identity, even the sex of the crowd was submerged beneath a sea of bobbing black umbrellas between which the wet and shining tops of the motor cars darted like huge black beetles. But the prosecutor saw neither the crowd nor the traffic—he saw only Mary Page! She had become almost an obsession with him now, and though it was not yet time for court and there were other clients besides the State whose business claimed his attention in his other office, he had drifted here, as he had drifted unwittingly each morning to mentally test the links in the chain of his evidence against her.

It SHOULD be strong enough to bind her upon the merciless wheel of the law, and yet he was conscious that more than one of its links was weak—so weak, in fact, that not even his masterly summing up for the jury had been entirely able to gloss it over. He did not doubt for a moment that Mary Page was guilty of the murder of James Pollock, but he had not PROVED her so to his own satisfaction.

He had shown that Pollock was in her eyes an enemy; he had proved that the dead man was a wooer whose pursuit was unwelcome; he had shown that twice during the recent years Pollock had forced Mary to promise to be his wife, but that once the necessity for that step was removed she had claimed her freedom again. She had everything to gain by his death, which was surely motive enough; added to which, if she were not guilty he felt she would not have fled that night after the murder.

Time after time as he went back to the testimony—to the fact that Mary had had the revolver in her bag, HAD gone into the room and HAD been found beside Pollock's body, he strove to glimpse some faint clue that would give a chance for "fresh evidence." In the meantime, it was Langdon's turn, and the keen-eyed District Attorney wondered curiously just what defense he would bring. Langdon's continual refusal to cross-examine the witnesses for the State had naturally kept his defense wonderfully well hidden.

The newspapers were, however, full of theories as to what the defence would be. Several claimed that it would be the "unwritten law," the guarding of Mary Page's honor; another that it would be proved that Pollock shot himself when he found that not even his support of her stardom could make Mary marry him; while still a third said that the real criminal would "confess" when put upon the stand. Absurd, all of them, and yet the third theory brought a frown to the lawyer's face. Suppose Langdon himself confessed to the murder!

"Hello, Chief!" A voice from the door interrupted his revery and he turned quickly.

"Hello, Sheenan. Have you got anything?"

"No," he said, "not a thing along the lines you spoke of. Slade doesn't know anything except what he told, and I've traced Langdon's movements for three days before the murder, down to each minute, and there's nothing to hang a dog's hair to."

"Did you find out about the automobiles parked on that night?"

"Yep; but Casey was on the job at that corner, and there wasn't as much as a ghost of a motor went into the street back of the hotel. The back gates of the houses were locked—had been tried by the watchman just a few minutes earlier, and the police were on the job anyway, on account of the club there. The Page woman must have gone down the fire-escape and climbed into the hotel at another floor—that's the only answer."

The prosecutor turned again to the window. "All right," he said curtly. But the detective lingered.

"Say, Chief," he suggested hesitatingly, "have you talked to Daniels? Little fat guy that runs the Covington? I saw him yesterday and he looks—well, sick."

The prosecutor laughed.

"He doesn't know anything. I've pumped him dry as powder."

A discreet knock sounded, and the bailiff put his head in at the door.

"His Honor is ready to go into Court, sir," he said; and with a nod of relief the prosecutor gathered up his papers.

"Defence begins today, don't it?" asked the detective as he left. "What do you guess it's going to be?"

"I'm not guessing anything," said the District Attorney grimly, "except that his witnesses are going to have a bad time when they get into my hands."

"Tell me something I don't know!" chuckled the detective with h nest admiration, though after a moment's pause he added behind his superior's back, "But Mary Page has got the sympathy of the crowd at that, by glory!"

She HAD won the the sympathy of the spectators now—there was no doubt of it, and the hostility that was

"His witnesses are going to have a bad time when they get into my hands."

writ so large on the faces for her at the beginning now greeted the prosecutor instead, and it was a hostility that somehow was the more acute because the faces were so oddly familiar—so familiar, in fact, that he had almost spoken to one of the men who sat in the front row when he had passed him in the corridor the day before.

The reporters seemed like old friends, too, and he noticed with a grim little smile that one of the "sob sisters" had on a new and very becoming hat, and he wondered ironically whether it was in honor of the defence or because the day before one of the star writers on a big daily had changed his seat in order to sit beside her.

There was an extra briskness about the newspaper group today, for today the defence of Mary Page would begin. Today Langdon must strip off the mask of a smiling confidence and show what lay behind it.

The mask, or at any rate the smile, was still there when he came into court, not with Mary, this time, but with her mother. His hand was tucked protectingly under the arm of the little gray-haired woman, and his lips were close to her ear as if he were murmuring a final encouragement—or a final instruction!

Mary, too, was smiling, and silently repeating:

"Today we will begin my defence. Today Philip will start to set me free!" And not even in her own heart would she let herself contemplate the thorny path that must be traveled before that elusive freedom had struck the invisible gyves from off her wrists and heart. Suddenly she heard the first witness of the day called.

"Mrs. Annie Page!"

The frail little woman seemed to have visibly shrunk when she took her place in the witness-stand.

"Mrs. Page, how long ago was it that you met the man who later became your husband?"

"Thirty-one years ago at Christmas."

"But it was some years before you were married, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because of—of Mr. Page's habits. My parents insisted upon my breaking the engagement."

"But it was later renewed?"

"Yes. He promised me that he would stop drinking, and I believed. God knows, a woman always believes that—from a man."

"Will you tell us, please," Langdon's voice was warning in its sharpness, "as concisely as you can what happened after your marriage?"

"What happened," she said wearily, "is what happens to thousands of women. We hadn't been married very long before my husband began to drink again. The—the—night that the certainty that Mary was coming to us from God came to me—he was out till dawn and had to be brought home too drunk to even know where he was

And all the while that I was making ready for her, he made my inability to go out with him an excuse for debauch. And oh, your Honor—" she added, turning to the Judge with a catch in her voice, "night after night I used to walk the floor, praying like a wicked woman that my baby might die before it came into the world—because I was afraid it would bear the taint—would be born with that awful devastating thirst."

"Did your husband ever strike you when he was drunk?" Again Langdon's voice held that warning note, but now the prosecutor broke in sharply:

"May it please the court, I protest against this evidence, as irrelevant! As being a palpable effort to arouse sympathy towards the prisoner and her mother and therefore a menace to the progress of justice."

"On the contrary, your Honor," Langdon took an eager step forward, and there was a sharp thrill almost of triumph in his voice as he spoke, "it is my intention to prove by this testimony that Mary Page, through prenatal influence, was born with so great a horror of drink, as to induce, in her, moments of temporary insanity even when she was a little child. And if Mary Page fired the shot that killed James Pollock she did so while suffering from an attack of 'repressed psychosis' to which she has been subject all her life."

The words spread like a flame through the tinder of curiosity and leapt from lip to lip not only through the court itself, but spread by some telepathic means to those hovering in the corridor without. The defence was known at last. It was temporary insanity under a new and delightfully erudite title!

It caught the prosecutor unawares. He appreciated its cleverness, even though he doubted its honesty. It offered an excuse for everything—the shooting, the flight, Mary's repeated and hysterical assertions that she remembered nothing except Pollock's endeavor to make her drink—but it was so unexpected that he had no quick parry for Langdon's appeal, and he was not surprised when the Judge bade the latter continue his questioning.

"Mrs. Page, I will repeat my former question to you. Did your husband ever strike you when he was drunk?"

"Yes." The word was no more than a whisper.

"Did he ever strike you just before your child was born?"

"Yes." The answer came more quickly now, fiercely, the mother dominant above the wife.

"Will you tell us of the circumstance, please?"

"It was one night when I had been sitting up sewing. My husband came home very drunk. He—he frightened me and I ran from him. That infuriated him—he ran after me—and seized me by the shoulder! Then—he—he struck me. But he held me so tight that my shoulder for days bore the imprint of his fingers in a great bruise on the flesh."

"Have you ever seen another bruise like that?"

"Yes."

"Where?" The question snapped out brutally, and Mary, leaning forward, stretched out one shaking hand toward

"Did your husband ever strike you when he was drunk?"

her mother—in appeal or encouragement, it was hard to say which.

"Upon the shoulder of my baby! When Mary was born the imprint of five fingers, like purple bruises, showed on her shoulder."

"Did they remain there?"

"No. They faded as she grew older."

"Did they ever recur?"

"Yes. The first time was when Mary was five years old. Mr. Page had come home—intoxicated—and was sitting in the library. Mary ran to him and he took her on his knee. Suddenly she began screaming and striking at him, and he pushed her off his lap. Then—" she faltered a little, but went bravely on, "Mr. Page took a flask of whiskey out of his pocket, and half in fun, half in anger, grabbed Mary and tried to force the liquor on her. She—she seemed to go mad, and when I snatched her away from him her little nightgown had slipped off her shoulder and there—plainly—could be seen the marks of the hand!"

A murmur of excitement crept about the reporter's table as well as among the spectators. This was "great stuff," and when Mary's trembling hand came back from its impotent reaching toward her mother, and went sharply to her left shoulder, there was no one in the room who needed the answer to Langdon's question.

"Which shoulder was that mark upon, Mrs. Page?"

"The left one."

"How long was it before the child stopped screaming?"

"Several hours, and she was feverish and ill for days."

Langdon's voice now changed abruptly, and the prosecutor's eyes narrowed to the watchfulness of a cat's, as the former asked:

"On the night when your daughter repudiated her engagement to James Pollock, were you sitting up waiting for their return from a dance?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell the court as briefly as possible what occurred?"

"It was very late. I had been waiting what seemed to me hours before they came in. Mr. Page, who was very much under the influence of liquor, was berating Mary, and once he started to strike her, but Mr. Pollock interfered, telling me that Mary and I had better go and try and get some rest. Once in her own room, however, my daughter broke down and sobbed and said, 'Your grief and father's danger made me accept Mr. Pollock. Tonight I tried to run away with Philip, because he is the man I love—but I am helpless in your hands.'"

"Did you still urge Miss Page to marry Mr. Pollock?"

"No. My daughter's happiness was too great a price to pay to save my husband from the penalty of his crime, and I told Mary that she and I together would go to James that very day and plead with him to set her free. It was dawn then, and finally she went to sleep."

"Did you make that plea to Mr. Pollock?"

"No. We went to the office—but—but—we didn't see Mr. Pollock."

"Will you tell the Court why? Not me, Mrs. Page, but the court—as if I were not present."

"Well, your Honor," she said, turning to the Judge, "when my daughter and I reached Mr. Pollock's office the door was open and Mr. Langdon was in there. As we came up we heard Mr. Pollock say, 'Give me a fair chance—that's all I ask, and I've never had it. You leave town for two weeks, and if on your return Mary Page still prefers you—I will withdraw and give her up to you.' Mr. Langdon demurred at first. Then he said he would go that day and hurried out without seeing either Mary or me. I felt we ought to see Mr. Pollock, anyway, but before we could go into the office we heard a door creak, and my husband's voice." She broke off with a smothered sob, and Langdon prompted her quickly:

"What did your husband say, Mrs. Page?"

"He said, 'With Langdon out of the way, our little scheme should work nicely.' Then—then Mary pulled at my sleeve and said, 'Come away without seeing them, Mother. We must warn Philip—and they mustn't know we have been here.' So we went to Mr. Langdon's office, and he arranged to come to the house late that night in the hope that we would have learned by that time what the scheme was."

"Did you learn?"

"Yes. Shortly after Mr. Langdon had come, my husband and Mr. Pollock came in and Mr. Pollock told us that he had bought the mortgage on our home. He said that if Mary would marry him within a week he would give her the mortgage and the forged check as a wedding gift. If she didn't—he would foreclose and put the check into the hands of the police."

"Did Miss Page agree?"

"She said she would answer him the next day, and he said he would wait, though my husband was angry that there should be any delay. Then Mr. Pollock went, and Mary joined Mr. Langdon, and they started for a walk."

"Did you see them go?"

"No. I went to the kitchen to fix the fire for the night. But I was drawn to the window by hearing angry words and saw my husband berating Mr. Langdon. I was so terrified over it all and—and—so heartbroken at the thought of losing my home, that I hurried out and begged Mary to come in—to do anything to quiet her father. So she said goodnight to Mr. Langdon and, coming in, went straight to her room."

"Did you go to your room also?" Langdon's voice shook ever so little as he spoke, for her words brought back so vividly that time of horror when he had stood silently in the little garden waiting for the quiet of night to settle over the house that held the girl he loved so well and seemed so likely to lose—the girl whom he was next to see in so terrible a guise!

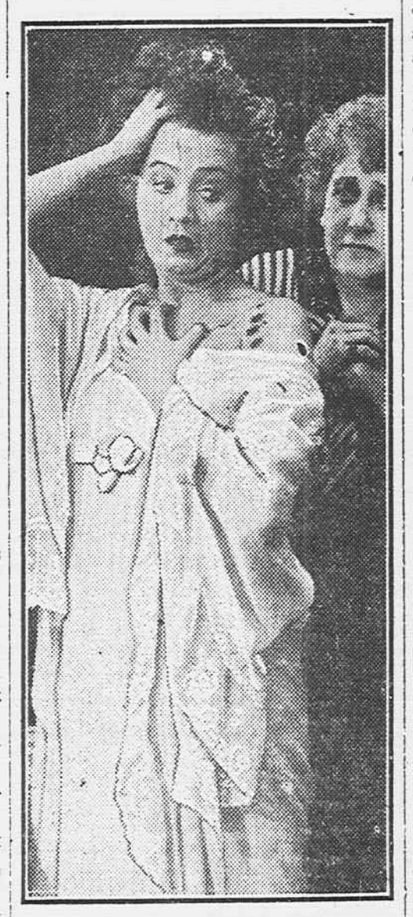
"No. I—I—went to my husband, who was in the kitchen, and tried to make him stop drinking and go to bed. But he—he was violent. He accused me of—of urging Mary not to marry Pollock, and when I said that she shouldn't if it would make her unhappy he—he struck me. The blow knocked me down. Mary, who was partially undressed, heard us—and came down, and he turned on her. He—struck her, and then he caught her by the shoulder and forced her to her knees."

Sobs caught in her throat. She could not go on for a moment, and the tears rolled unheeded down her cheeks, as, stammering a little and speaking almost incoherently, she cried, "And then, your Honor—Mary screamed! Screamed the way she had before, and I—I—saw her go mad before my very eyes! Mr. Langdon, who had been waiting in the garden—to be sure all was right with us—heard the scream too, and came running in. My husband saw him—and he snatched the poker out of the fire where in my haste I had left it, and swung it at Mr. Langdon. But it was Mary he hit. I heard the sound of it—I smelt the burnt flesh, and as Mr. Langdon flung my husband to the floor I ran to her. But before I could reach her—or stop her—she ran, still screaming, out of the house and disappeared!"

A passion of tears shook her as she finished, tears that were mirrored in all the eyes in the room. Even Langdon's voice was unsteady as he said gently:

"That is all, Mrs. Page."

Mary was sobbing too, but they were the tears of sad memories rather than present suffering, and she flung a



"I—I—saw her go mad before my very eyes!"

grateful glance from beneath her wet lashes towards the prosecutor when his curt,

"No questions," released Mrs. Page from the stand and set her at liberty to drag herself back to her quiet corner.

She had laid bare all the tragedy of her married life for the sake of her child; and what it had cost her to tell so calmly the story of shame and want and suffering and of the efforts of the drunken father to sell his daughter to a man she did not love—only she herself knew. There was more than one woman among the spectators who could and did guess what it cost her, and whose heart went out to her in pity.

It was, however, an unfinished story that she had told, and the room was vibrant with the unspoken query, "Where did Mary go?" when Langdon called his next witness:

"Alexander MacPherson!"

The burly Scotchman, with his deeply tanned face, his heavy beard and rough clothes, was a striking contrast to the delicate little witness who had gone before him, and he surveyed the Judge and jury with a wary hostility that under less tragic circumstances would have won a smile from the spectators.

"MacPherson, you are a woodsman, are you not?"

"I am, sir."

"Where were you employed six years ago?"

"I was wurkin' to the Paisley estate, clearin' out the auld timber in the woods." There was a hint of a Scottish accent in his speech, though long years in America had left it no more than a burr, pleasantly suggestive of the wide woodland spaces among which his life was spent.

"Did you ever see Miss Page?"

"Yes, sir. She came tae the woods often. She had a luve of the wild things in her heart, and I'd coom across her many times, sittin' wie a book, or just dreamin' in the woods."

"MacPherson, can you remember the last time that you saw Mary Page in the woods of the Paisley estate?"

"I've a gude memory," he answered rebukingly, "and it was a time to set in anyone's mind. 'Twas on the night of the party Jim Hanley give, up to the ridge."

"Will you tell us, please, what occurred on that night?"

"I had been tae the party and was comin' home. We had sat sae lang it were pretty late, and I says to myself, 'I'll na go way round by the road, but straight through the woods.' I knew them too well to lose my way, even in the dark. I had coom almost to the Hollow, which is like a bowl in the middle of the wood, when I heard somebody singin'. It came strange like in the night, and I am nae ashamed to say I was scared, so I stood—not hidin', mind ye, but waitin' tae see what it was. Then I seen a figure on the other side of the hollow coomin' through the trees—all in white—and wavin' its arms, daft-like, and singin' and laughin' and cryin' all in one."

"Could you see who it was?"

"Not at first, it were too far away, but I says to mysel', 'It's nae a ghost, or a fairy. 'Tis some puir daftie got away from its keeper. I'll wait till it gets nearer, then try and stop it.'"

"Could you hear what she was singing?"

"Nae. But presently I heard another voice—a voice shoutin', and I knew it were someone after her. I was minded to shout back, but I was afraid of scarin' the poor daft thing, so I stood watchin' till suddenly she coom out into a patch of moonlight and I saw her face. It was Mary Page!"

A little gust of whispering comment rippled through the room, and the Judge, leaning forward, broke in sharply:

"How far distant was this figure when you first thought you recognized it as Mary Page?"

"I dinna ken, exactly," said the woodsman thoughtfully, "'twas no more than maybe twice the width of the space of you door," nodding towards the entrance into court, "but to get to her I would have had to skirt the lip of the hollow, so I stood still, watchin'."

"Will you tell us how Miss Page looked?"

"Her dress or her petticoats was all torn and muddy, her hair was hangin' down onto her shoulders, and her face and arms were scratched and bloody and there was something that looked like a great sore on her forehead. She moved like a blind person, stumblin' over stumps and bumpin' into the trees, and yet she kep' on that strange croonin' song—laughin', too, at times."

"Could you hear any other sound?"

"Aye, I heard a voice callin', 'Mary! Mary!' And I could hear the smashin' of the underbrush as somebody came runnin', but she didna look around."

"Did she pass you?"

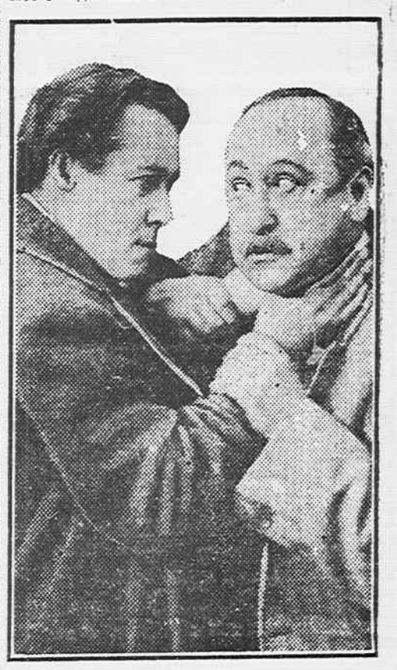
"No; she skirted the hollow round the other side, but I could see her. I wouldna let her out of my sight, till she were safe, but I didna want to lay hands on a daftie mysel'. Then suddenly I saw a man come runnin' through the woods, and when he saw her, he gave a great cry and shouted, 'Thank God!' Then he called again, 'Mary, Mary—wait for me—wait for me, dear!' The echo in the hollow caught it up so that the whole woods were full of the cry, and at that she turned, and stood swayin'—like a young sapling cut at the root. Then she gave a cry, and fell all crumpled in a little heap."

"Did you go forward then?"

"I started, but before I could get around to them, the man had pickit the lassie up and carried her down by by the brook in the hollow."

"Could you still see them?"

"Aye, like in a theatre, for the moon shone down there, while I stood above them in the trees. The man, who was Mr. Langdon, here, kep' wet his handkerchief and bathin' her poor face till she opened her eyes and said, 'Philip, Philip!' And at that, he held her close and sobbed like a child, and said, 'Mary, Mary, are you all right now, dear?' And she said, 'I'm tired—where have I been?' And he said, 'Never mind, dear, you can rest now—you are safe in my arms.' Then suddenly she gives a scream and cries, 'Don't let father touch me—don't let him touch me! Oh, Philip, I can feel it on my shoulder—it burns—it burns!' And he kissed her and said, 'There is nothin' on your shoulder except my kisses, Mary. Put the fear out of your head; nothin' can harm you while I have you safe.' And she says, 'Not even James?' And he says, 'Not even James, d—— him!' Then she gives a little sigh like a bairn that is tired, and



"Mr. Langdon flung my husband to the floor."

holds up her lips to be kissed, and then snuggles her puir head in his shoulder, and he knelt there holdin' her."

"You went up to them then, did you not?"

"Well, you know that," answered the Scotchman with some scorn. "I went up and I said, 'Can I help you carry the puir lassie home?' And he said, 'No, I shall not move her till she has rested a bit.' Then he wraps her in his coat and sits watchin' her, but after a bit he says, 'She's been sleepin' sound, I can carry her now,' and he picks her up in his arms and starts off."

"Did Miss Page speak when she was moved?"

"Yes; she said 'Am I still safe with you, Phil?' And he says, 'Yes.' And she says, 'Oh, I wish I was dead—except for you, dear.' And he said, 'I wish those who torture you were dead, my darling, but I'm going to guard you myself in the future.' Then, still holdin' her in his arms and carryin' her careful like, he went off through the trees."

(To be Continued.)